captioned "India greets India's purr with a roar" appearing in the Telegraph* dated the 20th July, 2001;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) whether any formal protest has been lodged with USA against this step while in offending India's popular sentiment;

(d) if so, the U.S. Government's response thereto and if not the reasons therefor; and

(e) what other steps are proposed to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) Government has seen the report that appeared in the Telegraph dated 20th July, 2001.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) The name of household pets is not a subject matter for inter-governmental discussion.

(e) Does not arise.

Restrengthening relationship with border countries

3406. SHRI W. ANGOU SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the measures taken up by Government for restrengthening the relationship with border countries;

(b) the reasons for restraint relationship between India and Bangladesh and India and Myanmar even though all possible helps have been extended to them; and

(c) the development programmes initiated by Government for improving relationship with South East Asia?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) Sir, a statement is placed on the Table of the House.

(a) It is the persistent policy of the Government of India to have cordial and peaceful relations with all the neighbouring countries. Government have all along striven to develop and strengthen mutually beneficial relations with countries bordering India. Government's efforts in this direction in respect of individual countries are detailed below:

(i) *Pakistan:*

India has always endeavoured to establish a relationship of peace, friendship and cooperation with Pakistan. For this purpose, in 1998, India initiated the Composite Dialogue, which seeks to build trust and confidence, establish a stable structure of cooperation and address outstanding issues. In February, 1999, Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Lahore, where India's commitment to establish such a relationship was reaffirmed. Recently, in keeping with our traditional approaches towards Pakistan, on 24th May 2001, Prime Minister extended an invitation to the President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, to visit India. Prior to the visit of President Musharraf, Government announced several significant confidence building measures, pertaining to peace and security, humanitarian issues, promotion of people-to-people contact and trade, which when implemented will contribute to the development of good neighbourly ties. The visit of the Pakistan President from 14 to 16 July 2001 marked the resumption of the dialogue process with Pakistan. Government have reaffirmed their commitment to continue with the dialogue process.

(ii) *China:*

Government of India are committed to the development of friendly and good nieghbourly relations with China on the basis of the principles of Panchsheel and mutual sensitivity to each others concerns. This has been underscored during recent high level political exchanges between India and China, including during the visit of senior Chinese leader and NPC Chairman Mr. Li Peng in January 2001 and the visit of Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, Smt. Najma Heptulla to China in July 2001.

India and China seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question through peaceful consultation. India & China have signed an agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas in 1993 and a second agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas in 1996. These two Agreements provide an institutional framework for the maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas. Both sides have also agreed to expedite the process of LAC clarification within existing mechanisms.

Bilateral trade between India and China has been steadily expanding In the year 2000, two-way trade was USS 2.92 billion, an increase of 47%

over the previous year. As per Chinese statistics, in the first six months of year 2001, bilateral trade has reached USS 1.79 billion, an increase of 36.5% over the same period last year. Both sides are making efforts to further expand trade and economic cooperation.

There has also been a diversification of exchanges in the fields of education, culture, science & technology, information technology, labour, etc.

(iii) *Nepal:*

India and Nepal have always shared an intimate relationship with extensive bilateral cooperation. Periodic exchange of high level visits, regular exchange of views at bilateral fora and growing economic cooperation over the years have characterised our close relations. The External Affairs Minister undertook a three-day goodwill visit to Nepal from August 17—19, 2001. During this visit, the first such high-level contact between the two countries since the enthronement of King Gyanendra, EAM had an audience with the King; reviewed bilateral relations with new Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and exchanged views with top political leaders.

(iv) *Bhutan:*

Bhutan is one of our closest neighbours with which our relationship has been most cordial and our bilateral economic cooperation has resulted in significant benefits to the people of the two countries. Foreign Secretary visited Bhutan in May 2001. The Crown Prince of Bhutan, HRH Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck is currently on a goodwill visit to India from August 20—31, 2001.

(v) *Sri Lanka:*

India continues to strengthen its traditional friendly relations with Sri Lanka. There is regular interaction through high level visits. Co-operation is being intensified in diverse areas with an emphasis on economic linkages following the operationalisation of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement in March 2001.

(vi) *Maldives:*

India and Maldives enjoy close and cordial relations. The warmth of these relations have been kept up through regular exchange of high-level visits between the two countries. India have been assisting the Maldives in its developmental efforts especially in the areas of human resource development and public health.

(b) *Bangladesh and Myanmar:*

To strengthen bilateral relations with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, Government have enhanced mutually beneficial linkages in the economic and infrastructural fields, promoted mutual trust and cooperation in areas of common concern and facilitating people-to-people contacts through cultural exchanges, human resources development and travel. Consequently, India's relations with Bangladesh and Myanmar are expanding and diversifying. Recent positive developments include, inter alia, the restoration of the Petrapole- Benapole railway link between India and Bangladesh for carriage of freight, singing of agreements to start a bus service between Agartala and Dhaka as well as a passenger rail service between Sealdah and Jamunabridge East, liberalisation of India-Bangladesh visa regime to facilitate travel of people. With Myanmar, exchange of high level visits has strengthened political contacts and mutual understandings.

(c) *South East Asian Countries:*

Our 'Look East' policy gave impetus to our widening i relationship with countries of South East Asia with whom we have historical, social, cultural and economic ties. Under the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership, co-operative activities and projects have been taken up with the ASEAN countries in areas of Advanced Materials, Biotechnology, Information Technology, Promotion of Trade and Investment Linkages, human Resources Development, and People to People Interactions. Under the framework of BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand-Economic Cooperation) discussions are being held on cooperation in the areas of Trade and Investment, Technology, Tourism, Culture & Energy, Transport and Communication and Fisheries. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) has recently been launched involving cooperation among India, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand in culture, tourism, Human Resource Development, Communication and infrastructure.

Indo-Australian discussion

3407. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during his recent official visit to Australia he had discussions with Government leaders of that country on various strategic issues of a possible common perspective;

(b) whether it is a fact that the US National Missile Defence concept was also discussed with his Australian counterpart; and